AP LITERARY TERMS

**Allegory** Tale in verse or prose in which characters, actions, settings

represent abstract ideas or moral qualities Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*

**Alliteration** Repetition of accented consonant sounds at the beginning of

words for effect “The noisy gnat knitted nine sweaters”

**Allusion**

A reference in literature or art to previous literature, history,

mythology, pop culture/contemporary events, or the Bible

(usually without explanation)

“It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles

And see the great Achilles”

(Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “Ulysses”)

**Ambiguity** Quality of being intentionally unclear, allowing events or

situations to be interpreted in more than one way

“Thou still unravished bride of quietness”

(John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” – *still* can

mean ‘never living,’ or ‘yet,’ or ‘enduring,’ or

‘silent’)

**Anachronism** Element in a story that is out of its time frame In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare mentions caps,

which the Romans did not wear

**Analogy**

Comparison of unfamiliar or unusual concept or object with

one that is familiar, usually forcing the reader to think about a

concept more critically

“Knowledge always desires increase: it is like

fire, which must first be kindled by some

external agent, but which will afterwards

propagate itself.”

(Samuel Johnson)

**Anticlimax** A sudden and disappointing end to an intense situation.

Many critics consider Jim’s capture and rescue

in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* an

example of anticlimax

**Antihero**

A protagonist who carries the action of a literary piece but

does not embody the classic characteristics of courage,

strength, and nobility

Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*,

Yossarian in *Catch 22*, and Merseult in *The*

*Stranger*

**Antithesis** A concept that is directly opposed to a previously presented

idea (thesis)

In *Star Wars*, Darth Vader’s ideals are

antithetical to those of the Jedi

**Aphorism** A terse statement that expresses a general truth or moral

principle

“Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man

healthy, wealthy, and wise”

(Benjamin Franklin)

**Apostrophe** Direct address to a person, object, or abstract entity that is not

present and/or cannot answer

“Death, be not proud” (John Donne)

“Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour!”

(William Wordsworth)

**Apotheosis** Elevating someone or something to the level of a god Homer apotheosizes Helen of Troy for her

beauty in *The Iliad*

**Archetype**

A situation, symbol, or character type that recurs in

mythology, folklore, and literature of a wide variety of cultures

throughout the world

The classic hero, the quest, the trickster, the

dark forest, the fair maiden, the mentor, the

sidekick, etc.

**Aside** Short speech or remark made by an actor to the audience

rather than to other characters

In a room full of people, Macbeth announces

his plans to the audience in an aside: “To the

castle of Macduff I will surprise…” ( IV, I, 150)

**Assonance** The repeated use of a vowel sound “Twice five miles of fertile ground” (Samuel

Taylor Coleridge, “Kubla Khan”)

**Attitude**

The author’s feelings toward the topic he or she is writing

about, revealed through point of view, word choice, sentence

structure, etc.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee uses an

innocent and unjaded child to express her own

attitude toward prejudice.

**Aubade**

A poem or song about lovers who must leave one another in

the early hours of the morning

“Song” and “Break of Day” by John Donne

**Ballad**

Folk song or poem passed down orally that tells a story (often

loosely based on an actual incident), usually composed in

four-line stanzas (quatrains) with rhyme scheme *abcb*, often

contains a refrain

*Barbara Allen* (anonymous)

*Lord Randal* (anonymous)

**Blank verse**

Unrhymed iambic pentameter (five feet of two syllables each

with the first syllable unstressed and the second syllable

stressed)

Much of Shakespeare’s dialogue and the

entirety of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* are written in

blank verse

**Bildungsroman** Novel dealing with the formative years of the main character –

a “coming of age” novel

Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, Dickens’s *Great*

*Expectations*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*

**Byronic hero**

Character type, describes the autobiographical heroes of the

poetry of Lord Byron as well as numerous other heroes of

romantic poetry and fiction based on Byron’s model. The

Byronic hero is typically a handsome and wealthy man

consumed with an obsessive love for a woman who either

cannot or will not return that love in the same fashion. The

Byronic hero is characterized by a mysterious past and seems

to possess some dark secret or past sin that is never fully

revealed

Harold in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*

Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*

Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*

Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*

Rhett Butler in *Gone With The Wind*

Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers*

Batman of comic book fame

**Caesura** A pause within a line of poetry that breaks the regularity of the

metrical pattern

“Then be not coy, || but use your time; And

while ye may, || go marry”

(Robert Herrick, “To The Virgins…”)

Carpe diem

[Latin ‘seize the day’] frequent theme of 16th & 17th century

poetry; promotes the pursuit of earthly pleasures (especially

sex) while one is young and carefree

“To The Virgins, Make Much of Time” by Robert

Herrick

“To His Coy Mistress” by Andrew Marvell

**Catalog** List of people or things incorporated in an epic or a romance,

includes in-depth description of each

The list of fallen angels in lines 374-505 of Book

I of *Paradise Lost*

**Catharsis**

Term coined by Aristotle to describe an emotional cleansing

or feeling of relief gained through the release of the negative

emotions of pity and fear while watching tragedy

Many people are upset by the death of John

Proctor near the end of *The Crucible*; they are

experiencing *catharsis*

**Chiasmus** The opposite of parallel construction: inverting the second of

two phrases that would otherwise be parallel

Parallel:

“I like the idea; I don’t like its execution.”

Chiasmus:

“I Like the idea; its execution, I don’t.”

**Classicism** Tendency in art of Ancient Greece and Rome to place

emphasis on reason, clarity, balance, and order

The works of Virgil and Horace produced during

the reign of Augustus, e.g. *The Aeneid*

**Colloquialism**

Slang word or phrase characteristic of a particular regional

dialect, used in everyday conversation. Used in writing to

reflect the way people speak in a particular time and/or place

The speech of Pap in *Huck Finn* is filled with

colloquialisms:

“Looky here – you drop that school, you hear?

I’ll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs

over his own father.”

**Comic relief** Humor that provides relief of tension between more serious

episodes

The bawdy jokes of the porter following

Duncan’s murder in *Macbeth*

**Conceit**

A far-fetched comparison between two seemingly unrelated

things; an extended metaphor that gains appeal from its

unusual or extraordinary comparison

“This flea is you and I, and this / Our marriagebed

and marriage-temple is.”

(John Donne, “The Flea”)

**Connotation** Meaning or abstract value typically associated with a word; it

that transcends the dictionary meaning

*Home* connotes warmth and security; *house*

does not

**Consonance** Repetition of same consonant sounds in words with different

vowel sounds

“Far on the ri*n*gi*n*g plai*n*s of wi*n*dy Troy”

(Tennyson, “Ulysses”)

**Couplet** Two successive rhyming lines of the same number of

syllables with matching cadence

“Hope springs eternal in the human breast:

Man never is, but always to be blest.”

(Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*)

**Denotation** Literal, dictionary definition of a word or phrase

*Thin* and *skinny* both have the denotation of

‘not fat,’ thought their connotations are slightly

different

DÉNOUEMENT

*(pronounced “daynoo-*

*maw”)*

[Literally, ‘unravelling’] Outcome or clarification at the end of a

story or play; the winding down from climax to ending

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the dénouement occurs

after Dimmesdale’s death.

***Deus ex machina***

*(pronounced “day-oos*

*ecks mocky-nuh”)*

[Latin, literally ‘god from a machine,’ the term comes from

Greek drama in which the character of a god would be

lowered onto the stage with a crane] The term describes a

person who suddenly and unexpectedly appears or reveals a

hidden identity and (often unacceptably) solves what had

been a seemingly impossible dilemma, producing a “cop-out”

ending

Charles Dickens has often been accused of

incorporating a *deus ex machina* (i.e. John

Barsad in *A Tale of Two Cities*) to very

conveniently (and perhaps unbelievably so)

provide a solution to conflicts in his work

**Diction** Words deliberately chosen to achieve a particular effect or

tone

Hawthorne’s diction in *The Scarlet Letter* is

formal, allowing for a serious criticism of Puritan

hypocrisy, while Twain’s diction in *Huck Finn* is

informal, allowing for an ironic and humorous

criticism of contemporary American hypocrisy.

**Didactic** Adjective used to describe a work in which the author’s

primary purpose is to instruct, teach, or moralize Aesop’s fables are didactic.

**Dramatic monologue** Poem in which one character (not the author himself) speaks

to other character(s). Typical of the Victorian era

“My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning

“Ulysses” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

**Dynamic character** Character who exhibits marked change in attitude, beliefs,

temperament, personal relationships, etc. Scrooge in Dickens’s “A Christmas Carol”

**Elegy** Poem of mourning over the death of an individual “Lycidas” by John Milton

**Elision** The omission of an unstressed vowel or syllable to preserve

the meter of a poem

“I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high *o’er* vales and hills.”

-William Wordsworth

**Ellipsis** An omission of words from a sentence, *often* (though *not*

*always*) indicated by three consecutive periods

“Composed in the Tower before his execution

These moving verses.”

- Anthony Hecht “’More Light! More Light!’”

**End-stopped line**

Line of poetry in which the grammatical and logical sense are

completed within the line (and thus a pause is expected when

reading aloud)

“A little learning is a dangerous thing;

Drink deep,or taste not the Pierian spring.

There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,

And drinking largely sobers us again.”

(Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*)

**Enjambment**

The running over of a clause or sentence from one line of

poetry into the next without a grammatical pause (remember,

when reading aloud, always read the *sentence* and not the

line)

“April is the cruelest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.

Winter kept us warm, covering

Earth in forgetful snow, feeding

A little life with dried tubers.”

(T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*)

**Epic machinery** The immortal beings who intervene in the lives of mortals to

prompt or to further the action in an epic poem

The gods of Olympus in *The Iliad* and *The*

*Odyssey*, God and the angels in Milton’s

*Paradise Lost*, the “sylphs” in Pope’s *The Rape*

*of the Lock*

**Epigram** Short, clever poem with a witty turn of thought

“Sir, I admit your general rule

That every poet is a fool,

But you yourself may serve to show it

That every fool is not a poet.”

(Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

**Epigraph** Brief quotation found at the beginning of a literary work Eliot includes two epigraphs at the beginning of

“The Hollow Men”

**Epiphany** A sudden flash of insight; a startling discovery and/or

appearance; a dramatic realization

Jocasta’s sudden realization that her husband

is her son is an epiphanous moment in *Oedipus*

*the King*

**Epistolary novel**

Novel whose plot is presented entirely through letters written

by a character or characters. The novelist can use this

technique to present varying first-person points of view

Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (consid-ered by

many to be the first true novel in English), which

consists entirely of letters written back and forth

between Pamela and her father

**Epithet** Adjective or phrase used to characterize someone or

something

*Gray-eyed* Athena, *the wine-dark* sea, *rosyfingered*

dawn (Homer)

**Euphemism** Substitution of an inoffensive word or phrase for another that

would be harsh, offensive, or embarrassing “He passed away” rather than “he died”

**Exemplum** Tale (often incorporated within a sermon) that illustrates a

moral principle “The Pardoner’s Tale” by Geoffery Chaucer

**Fantasy** Narrative involving unusual creatures and improbable or farfetched

events that are explained by way of spells, magic, etc.

Stoker’s *Dracula*

Rowling’s Harry Potter books

Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*

**Farce** A comedy that depends on exaggerated or improbable

situations to amuse the audience

*The Taming of the Shrew* by Shakespeare,

Sandler’s *The Waterboy*

**Flashback** Interruption of the chronological flow of a narrative by a

description of something that happened previously

*The Odyssey* begins with Odysseus washed up

on the shores of Phaecia. Homer relies on

flashback to narrate the hero’s adventures over

the last ten years

**Flat character** A simple, one-dimensional character with one defining trait

about whom little is revealed over the course of the work

Pap in *Huck Finn*

Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*

Lucy Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*

**Foil**

Character whose personal characteristics contrast with and

enhance those of another (a *foil* was originally a thin sheet of

shiny metal placed under a jewel to make it shine more

brightly)

Benvolio is a foil for Tybalt in Shakespeare’s

*Romeo and Juliet;* MacDuff is a foil for MacBeth

in *MacBeth*

**Free verse** Poetry that does not have regular rhythm or rhyme Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself”

**Genre** Category into which a piece of writing can be classified Poetry, prose, fantasy, tragedy, etc.

**Gothic literature**

Literature characterized by mysterious settings and an

atmosphere of terror and gloom. The gothic often involves

undertones of forbidden sexuality – incest, homosexuality,

hints at pedophilia, etc.

Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Stoker’s *Dracula*,

Coleridge’s “Christabel,” and everything ever

written by Edgar Allan Poe

**Grotesque** Describes characters and situations in literature that are

distorted and fantastically odd or unnatural Hulga in O’Connor’s “Good Country People.”

**Heroic couplet** In poetry, a couplet written in iambic pentameter

“The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read

With loads of learned lumber in his head.”

(Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*)

**Hubris** Pride to the point of arrogance or insolence. In Greek myth

and tragedy, hubris often leads to one’s downfall

Phaëthon, mortal son of Apollo, fell prey to his

own hubris when he mistakenly believed he had

the strength of a god and could drive the chariot

of his father

**Hyperbole** Extreme exaggeration not meant to be taken literally but

merely intended for effect

“A greenhouse arrived from Gatsby’s.” (F.

Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*)

**Iambic pentameter**

Poetry consisting of five iambs per line (an iamb is a foot (a

˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′

group of syllables of set number) of two syllables, with the first

syllable unaccented and the second syllable accented)

When I have fears that I may cease to be

˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′ ˘ ′

Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain

(John Keats, “When I Have Fears”)

***In medias res***

*(pronounced “in maydee-*

*us race”)*

[Latin, literally ‘in the midst of things’] Describes the method of

beginning a narrative by plunging into the middle of the action

without the formality of an introduction, later using flashback

to tell what has happened previously. Typical convention of

epic poetry.

Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Virgil’s *The Aeneid*, and

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* all begin *in medias res*

**Inversion** Switch in the normal word order, often employed for emphasis

or to maintain rhyme scheme or rhythm “Strong in the force he is” –Yoda

IRONY

Occurs whenever an author suggests one

conclusion while actually intending another, often

very different, one.

There are three basic types of irony:

• **Verbal irony** – occurs when the intended meaning of the

author’s words is the opposite of their literal

meaning

• **Irony of situation** – occurs when circumstances suggest

one conclusion but events actually produce a

very different one

• **Dramatic irony** – occurs when we know something a

character does not. As a result of his/her ignorance, the

character says or does something contrary to what we want

or expect him or her to say or do.

• Saying “That was graceful” when someone

slips and falls

• When the “diamond” necklace in Guy de

Maupaussant’s story “”The Necklace”

turns out to be made of paste

• In “Little Red Riding Hood” when Little Red

keeps stepping closer and closer to

“grandma” when we know she should be

running the other way.

**Kenning** Compound word or phrase replacing a common noun, typical

of Old English poetry

“Whale-path” for sea, “ring-giver” for king in

*Beowulf*

**Künstleroman** Novel depicting the growth of an artist from childhood into the

beginning stages of fulfilling his/her artistic destiny

James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a*

*Young Man*

**Litotes**

*(pronounced “lihtoe-*

*tease”)*

A negative understatement in which some truth is affirmed

through the negation of its opposite

“Building the pyramids was no small feat”

“Elvis was not unpopular in the South.”

**Lyric poem** Fairly short poem that expresses the observations, thoughts, “She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways” by

and feelings of a single speaker; lyric poems are not narrative

and therefore lack a plot with a climax

William Wordsworth

**Malapropism** Mistaken use of a word for another word it resembles, often

employed by authors for a humorous effect

“Don’t draw me no diaphrams!” – Archie Bunker

on *All in the Family; “*You’re like an albacore

around my neck!” – Tony Soprano’s father in

*The Sopranos*

**Meter**

The rhythmical pattern of a poem determined by the number

of feet per line (e.g. a line with 5 iambs is written in iambic

pentameter)

**Metonymy** Referring to a person or thing in terms of something else

closely associated with that person or thing

“The White House” instead of “the president

and his advisors,” “suits” instead of “company

executives,” etc.

**Mock heroic** Form of satire that applies the elevated diction, syntax, and

format of the classical epic to a trivial subject

“The Nun’s Priest’s Tale” by Chaucer

“The Rape of the Lock” by Pope

**Narrative poem** Poem that tells a story and (unlike lyric poetry) involves all of

the elements of plot (exposition,conflict,climax,etc.)

“Paul Revere’s Ride” by Henry Wadsworth

Longfellow

**Neoclassicism**

Tendency in later art to reflect the principles of reason, clarity,

balance, and order embodied in the works of Greece and

Rome in antiquity (characteristic of the Augustan movement in

English art in the early 1700’s)

The spirit of neoclassicism is captured in the

poetry of Alexander Pope, the fiction of Henry

Fielding, and the satire of Jonathan Swift.

**Octave** An eight-line unit, which may constitute a stanza or a section

of a poem (as in a Petrarchan sonnet) Lines 1-8 of Wyatt’s “Whoso List to Hunt”

**Oxymoron** Paradoxical figure of speech created through the juxtaposition

of two seemingly contradictory words

Living death, bitter sweet, cruel kindness

“Darkness visible” (Milton, *Paradise Lost*)

**Paradox** Statement or situation that on the surface seems impossible

but solves itself and conveys meaning

“The Child is the father of the Man”

(William Wordsworth)

**Parallelism**

The repeated use of the same grammatical structure in a

sentence or series of sentences; often used to emphasize

what is said and underscore the meaning

“I came, I saw, I conquered” (Plutarch)

**Parody** Comical imitation of a serious piece with the intent of ridiculing

the author or his work

Henry Fielding’s *Shamela*, written to ridicule

Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*

**Pastoral**

A poem, play, or story that idealizes and celebrates the simple

lives of country folk, especially shepherds; very popular until

the late 1700’s

“The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” by

Christopher Marlowe, “Michael” by Wordsworth

**Pathos**

The quality of a literary work or passage that evokes pity,

compassion, and/or sympathy on the part of the reader. This

pity is different from the pity one feels for a tragic hero in that

the pathetic figure seems to suffer through no fault of his or

her own

Dostoevsky incorporates pathos in his

description of Katerina Marmeladov in *Crime*

*and Punishment*

**Periodic sentence** Sentence that delivers its point at the end with no additional

information following the main point

In the spring we go camping.

At the piano she practiced scales.

**Pun** Humorous play on words that have several meanings or

words that sound the same but have different meanings

“We must hang together or we will hang

separately” (Benjamin Franklin)

**Quatrain** Four line stanza Stanzas in Roetke’s “My Papa’s Waltz”

**Recognition** The moment at which a character understands his or her

situation as it really is; a typical element of tragedy

When Oedipus finally comprehends his identity

and history in *Oedipus Rex*

**Rhyme**

The matching of final vowel and consonant sounds in two or

more words. There a few different types of rhyme:

• **End rhyme** – describes when rhymes occur at the ends of

lines

• **Internal rhyme** – describes when rhymes occur within lines

• **Feminine rhyme** – when the final syllable of a rhyme is

unstressed

• **Masculine rhyme** - when the final syllable of a rhymed word

is stressed

“Whose woods these are I think I know.

His house is in the village, though” (Frost)

“”Sam I am, I am Sam” (Seuss)

“The whisky on your breath

Could make a small boy *dizzy*

But I hung on like death

Such waltzing was not *easy*” (Roetke)

“The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the

*fold*

And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and

*gold.”*

(Byron)

**Romance**

Medieval tale dealing with loves and adventures of kings,

queens, knights, and ladies; so called because the earliest

tales of this type were composed in French, a language

derived from that of the Ancient Romans

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Sir Thomas Mallory’s *Le Mort d’Arthur*

Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale*

**Round character** Well-developed, multi-dimensional character who exhibits a

variety of moods, ideas, and facets to his/her personality Huckleberry Finn

**Satire**

Use of humor to expose and ridicule the shortcomings and

failings of individuals, institutions, and humanity at large, often

in the hope that change and reform are possible. Satire is still

categorized according to the

styles of its two early masters, Horace and Juvenal:

• *Horatian* satire is playfully amusing and seeks to correct vice

or foolishness with gentle laughter and sympathetic

understanding.

• *Juvenalian* satire is much more scathing and criticizes

corruption or incompetence with scorn and outrage.

• Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*

*The Simpsons*

• Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”

*South Park*

**Science fiction**

Narrative involving unusual creatures and improbable or farfetched

events that are explained through as-yet unknown

sciencific technological breakthroughs

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

H.G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*

**Segue**

*(pronounced “segway”)*

Means to get from one portion of a poem or story to another; a

way of smoothly connecting different parts of a work, often

involving transitional words or phrases

The gravedigging scene in Hamlet provides a

segue into Hamlet’s return to the castle

SESTET An six-line unit, which may constitute a stanza or a section of

a poem (as in a Petrarchan sonnet)

The concluding six lines of Wyatt’s “Whoso List

to Hunt”

**Soliloquy** In drama, speech in which a character presents inner

thoughts as if alone Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” speech

**Sonnet**

[Italian, literally ‘little song’] Fourteen line poem in iambic

pentameter. The two common types in English poetry:

• Petrarchan - octave (*abbaabba*) and sestet (*cdcdcd*)

Many poems of the Renaissance and the

Romantic era are sonnets. The form fell out of

favor and is almost completely absent from

eighteenth-century poetry, though it became

popular again in the Romantic era.

• Shakespearean – 3 quatrains (*abab, cdcd, efef*) followed by

a couplet (*gg*)

**Stanza** Deliberate grouping of lines of poetry

**Static character** Character who remains consistent throughout the book,

undergoing no significant change

Atticus Finch and Bob Ewell are both static

characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

**Stream of**

**consciousness**

A style of writing which attempts to replicate the way the

human mind works. Ideas are presented in random order;

thoughts are often interrupted and unfinished

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*

Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*

James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

**Style**

Way a writer uses language; takes into account diction,

syntax, figures of speech, etc. The writer’s characteristic

“voice”

Hemingway’s style is simple and

straightforward; Fitzgerald’s style is poetic and

filled with imagery.

**Synedoche** Figure of speech in which one part stands for the whole “All *hands* on deck!” “That’s a nice set of

*wheels*.” “We need a few strong *backs.*”

**Synesthesia** The description of one kind of sense impression by using

words that normally describe another

“Delicious-sounding music,” the “blue-black

cold” in Hayden’s “Winter Sundays”

**Syntax** The way in which words, phrases, and sentences are ordered

and connected

Twain often uses ungrammatical syntax to

imitate the dialects of his subjects

**Tale**

A story that narrates strange happenings in a direct manner,

without detailed descriptions of character (in fact, characters

are often not named)

Chaucer’s “The Pardoner’s Tale,” which tells

the story of three unnamed rioters.

**Theme**

A general idea about life that a work of literature challenges

the reader to think about

Love, family, civic responsibility, revenge,

forgiveness, morality, mortality – these are all

common themes in literature

**Tone**

Describes the way an author manipulates language to reveal

his or her attitude about a subject and thereby create the

mood of a work

The wry, witty tone of the narrator of Mark

Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* helps

established the light-hearted mood of the piece

overall

**Tragedy**

A type of drama in which a hero falls from glory into suffering

as a result of a tragic flaw. Tragedy typically involves a

moment of *recognition* in which the hero realizes that he is

largely to blame for his own fate.

*Oedipus Rex*, *MacBeth*, *Hamlet*

**Tragic flaw** Some defect or weakness (but not *wicked*ness) in a hero or

heroine that leads to his or her own downfall

Oedipus’s pride, Macbeth’s ambition, Hamlet’s

indecisiveness

**Tragic hero**

A privileged character held in great esteem who, by virtue of a

tragic flaw, experiences a reversal of fortune from good to bad

and experiences more suffering than is fair or deserved

Odeipus, MacBeth, Hamlet

**Verisimilitude** A work of fiction’s quality of appearing to be true to life, to Daniel Defoe includes a number of minute

have actually occurred details (ship’s inventory, tide times, sail times,

latitudes and longitudes, etc.) to lend *Robinson*

*Crusoe* a semblance of reality and to achieve

verisimilitude

**Verse Essay** An essay written in the form of a poem, restricted almost

exclusively to the Eighteenth Century

Pope’s “An Essay on Man” and “An Essay on

Criticism,” both consisting entirely of heroic

couplets.

**Volta** A marked shift in focus or tone between the octave and sestet

of a Petrarchan sonnet Go read a Petrarchan sonnet and find it!